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ABSTRACT

Portfolio assessment is an alternative form of assessment that is particularly attractive to adult, career, and vocational educators because it includes the assessment of active learning and performance rather than the mere recall of memorized facts. Portfolio assessment serves the interests of business and industry by forging a connection between activities in the classroom and in the workplace. With education's increasing focus on performance standards and student-centered classrooms, portfolios have become more than repositories of work samples. Portfolio assessment is well suited to integrated curricula. When portfolio criteria are linked to the curriculum and give students clear expectations of what is required, they are an effective tool for helping students see gaps in their learning, identify strategies supporting learning, set goals, and see change and development over time. Portfolios offer the additional benefit of involving students in the assessment process, and they offer teachers a way of motivating students, which is being recognized as a critical function of assessment. Some of the main issues regarding the difficulty of using portfolio assessment are related to reliability (specifically, problems in scoring and competency interpretation). (Contains 19 annotated references.) (MN)

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Portfolio Assessment: Missing Link in Student Evaluation Trends and Issues Alerts

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TRENDS AND ISSUES ALERTS
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ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

Portfolio Assessment: Missing Link in Student Evaluation

Portfolio assessment is an alternative form of assessment that is particularly attractive to adult, career, and vocational educators because it includes the assessment of active learning and performance rather than the mere recall of memorized facts. It serves the interests of business and industry as well by forging a connection between activities in the classroom and the world beyond school. The successful achievement of these anticipated outcomes, however, depends upon the purposes, practices, and structures that guide implementation of this new form of assessment. This Alert reviews the current trends in portfolio assessment and examines the issues that guide its use as a tool for evaluating student learning.

Portfolios were introduced initially as a way for artists, graphic designers, and other such professionals to show evidence of their work, illustrating their skill at applying knowledge to practice. With education's increasing focus on performance standards and student-centered classrooms, the portfolio has become more than a repository of work samples. As an assessment tool, the portfolio must reflect both the "breadth of study envisaged by the curriculum and the quality of work that students are expected to produce" (Borthwick 1995, p. 25).

Portfolio assessment extends the basis of assessment beyond the "conventional" or multiple-choice category to the "alternative" assessment of active learning based on clearly defined standards (Willis 1996). The appeal of portfolio assessment is its response to integrated curriculum. For example, the portfolio contents may include examples, reviews, and other demonstrations of students' vocational skills as well as academic achievements evidenced through multiple types of assessment, e.g., performance, process, and product assessments. It offers teachers "vital information for diagnosing students' strengths and weaknesses to help them improve their performance" (Borthwick 1995, p. 24). When portfolio criteria are linked to the curriculum and give students clear expectations of what is required, they are an effective tool for helping students "see gaps in their learning, determine strategies that support their learning, celebrate risk taking and inquiry, set goals for future experiences, and see change and development over time" (Porter and Cleland 1995, p. 23).

Portfolios offer the additional benefit of involving students in the assessment process. Portfolio assessment is not teacher driven as is common in conventional assessments. In keeping with the trend toward student-centered classrooms, portfolio assessment is a shared responsibility. It requires the involvement of students, parents, and employers, as well as teachers, in establishing the assessment standards, criteria, and content of the portfolio. It affords students the opportunity to manage and monitor their learning, document their progress and achievements over time, articulate their achievement levels, and, more important, experience success.

Portfolio assessment offers teachers a way of motivating students, which is being recognized as a critical function of assessment. "A good assessment model support students' desire to learn, rather than imposing a set of demands and expectations on them, which will blight their intrinsic motivation" (Willis 1996). Portfolio assessment motivates learning when it engages students in active learning and gives students some control over what and how they learn and how their performance will be assessed. A recognized value of portfolio assessment is that it can accommodate the diverse learning patterns of all students and enable each of them to realize and experience success (Caine and Caine 1990).

Some of the main issues regarding the difficulty of using of portfolio assessment are related to reliability (Stecher et al. 1996). Problems in *scoring* emerge when the portfolios contain different pieces and have diverse purposes. Lack of *standardization* in the way portfolio entries are produced and the amount of assistance students received present another assessment problem. *Competency interpretation* poses another problem of portfolio assessment in that "portfolios constructed of 'best pieces' may not reflect sustainable levels of performance under normal conditions" (Stecher et al. 1996, p. 60). Also of significance is that teachers may not be equipped to conduct effective portfolio assessments without staff development training and time to collaborate with other instructors to develop portfolio rating criteria.

The technical and practical issues of performance assessment are a continual challenge to educators. The annotated bibliography that follows provides sources for additional information about portfolio assessment and its use in adult, career, and vocational education.

Print Resources

Allenspach, D.; Laurenson, S.; White, R.; and Loyd, C. M. *Alternative Assessment: A Family and Consumer Sciences Teacher's Tool Kit*. Columbus: Vocational Instructional Materials Laboratory, The Ohio State University, 1996. (ED 402 434)
Shares current thinking, research, and practices regarding the use of alternative forms of assessment in family and consumer sciences occupational programs. Contains an overview of alternative assessment approaches and materials for beginning and conducting the various forms of alternative assessment.

Birrell, J., and Ross, S. "Standardized Testing and Portfolio Assessment: Rethinking the Debate." *Reading Research and Instruction* 35, no. 4 (Summer 1996): 285-298.
Argues that standardized testing and portfolio assessment are not oppositional methods for determining student growth and teacher effectiveness but are complementary means of gathering and interpreting information that can lead to more holistic evaluations of student achievement in school.

Borthwick, A. "Body of Evidence." *Vocational Education Journal* 70, no. 3 (March 1995): 24-26. (EJ 398 567)
Supports the use of portfolios as an authentic means of evaluation that helps students to assess their own strengths and weaknesses so that they can present themselves positively to a potential employer.

Bragg, D. "Assessing Postsecondary Vocational-Technical Outcomes: What Are the Alternatives?" *Journal of Vocational Education Research* 20, no. 4 (1995): 15-39.
Describes the practice of the most innovative 2-year colleges and community colleges in using nontraditional methods such as portfolio assessment to assess a wide variety of outcomes, including some not usually associated with vocational-technical education.

Bujan, J. et al. "Increasing Students' Responsibility for Their Own Learning. A Teaching and Leadership Action Research Project Report," St. Xavier University, May 1996. (ED 400 072)

Describes an action research project, the goal of which was to improve students' taking responsibility for their own learning and presents the following interventions: use of graphic organizers, problem-solving strategies, higher-order thinking skills, and portfolios.

Caine, R., and Caine, G. "Understanding a Brain-Based Approach to Learning and Teaching." *Educational Leadership* 48, no. 2 (October 1990): 66-70. (EJ 416 439)
Offers 12 principles as a general foundation for brain-based learning, including the brain is a parallel processor; learning engages the entire physiology; the search for meaning is innate and occurs through patterning; emotions are critical to patterning; and every brain simultaneously perceives and creates parts and wholes.

Duffy, L. *School-to-Work Career Portfolios, Instructional Guide. Family and Consumer Science*, 1996. (ED 401 447)
Describes the preparation of a school-to-work career portfolio by eighth-grade family and consumer science course teachers. Contains detailed instructions for designing a school-to-work career portfolio.

Far West Lab for Educational Research and Development. *Career Preparation Assessment. Portfolio Guidelines*. San Francisco, CA: Far West Lab, 1995. (ED 392 919)
Contains the materials and guidelines required to complete a Career Preparation Assessment (CPA) portfolio, which is a classroom-tested, employer-validated, performance-based assessment of career readiness skills for use by high school students.

Felstehausen, G. et al. *Authentic Assessment for Occupational Competency for Career and Technology Education. Final Report. Year Three*. Lubbock: Texas Tech University, 1996. (ED 396 110)
Reports on the field testing of the portfolio model in selected career and technology education programs and describes the portfolio evaluation contents: scoring sheets and rubrics for portfolio documents; rating or score sheets; letter grades and self-evaluation; and a holistic approach to evaluate the entire portfolio.

Gillespie, C. et al. "Portfolio Assessment: Some Questions, Some Answers, Some Recommendations." *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* 39, no. 6 (March 1996): 480-491.
Discusses answers to teachers' questions about portfolio assessment, e.g., advantages and weaknesses, type of data to be included, criteria for assessment, ways to determine validity and reliability, uses of portfolio assessment, and future outlook.

Lankard, B. *Acquiring Self-Knowledge for Career Development. ERIC Digest No. 175*. Columbus, OH: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, 1996. (ED 399 414)
Mentions portfolio assessment as one of the processes by which students can gain experiences that enhance their self-knowledge. Points out that there are various types of assessments that contribute to self-awareness, e.g., assessments using performance tests and documentation of performance through career passports and portfolios. Emphasizes the importance of student reflection upon what they are learning.

McLaughlin, M., and Vogt, M. *Portfolios in Teacher Education*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 1996. (ED 403 572)
Describes teacher education courses where undergraduate and graduate students learn about portfolios and experience their use firsthand and are evaluated using portfolio assessment techniques—the same methods they will use in their own classrooms. Also explores how portfolio assessment can enable university educators to move from traditional methods of testing to more authentic assessment that reflects each student's real progress.

Newmann, F.; Marks, H.; and Gamoran, P. "Authentic Pedagogy: Standards that Boost Student Performance." *Issues in Restructuring Schools. Issues Report No. 8*. Madison, WI: Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools, 1995. (ED 404 346)
Describes the development of portfolio management strategies to assess the oral language and literacy skills of sixth- and seventh-grade students in English as a second language urban middle school classrooms.

Newman, C. et al. "Student-Maintained Portfolios and Peer Mentoring as a Means of Empowering and Motivating Students: Unexpected Outcomes." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Eastern Educational Research Association, Boston, MA, February 1996. (ED 404 346)
Reports on the development of oral language and literacy skills and the development of portfolio management strategies to assess these skills in sixth- and seventh-grade students. Describes evaluation results which indicate that the portfolio management system has been largely successful in helping students become involved in assessing their progress.

Porter, C., and Cleland, J. *The Portfolio as a Learning Strategy*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Publishers, 1995. (ED 375 433)
Looks in depth at the curricular and instructional framework of a student-centered classroom. Describes learning strategies in detail and illustrates with student samples that portfolios can assist students in reflective self-evaluation.

Reckase, M. "The Design and Field Test of the ACT Portfolio System." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Council on Measurement in Education, New York, April 1996. (ED 400 313).
Describes the field testing of a portfolio assessment model designed for use on a national level to determine if its implementation will result in scores that are of sufficient reliability and validity that they can be used for decisions at the student level. Includes a description of the efforts.

Redman, W. *Portfolios for Development: A Guide for Trainers and Managers*. East Brunswick, NJ: Nichols Publishing, 1994. (ED 394 059)
Describes the use of portfolios as a way demonstrate competence and show development needs among employees in organizations. Explains how the portfolio is linked with the current training revolution taking place through the introduction of National Vocational Qualifications in Great Britain. Shows how portfolios can be used within an organization's own training and development program.

Stecher, B. et al. *Using Alternative Assessments in Vocational Education*. Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 1996. (ED 400 465).
Describes alternative assessments in vocational education, reviews examples from extended case studies, and discusses criteria to use to choose among assessment alternatives. Contents describe the assessment alternatives and the primary purpose served by each type, the conditions that are creating pressure for alternative methods of assessment among vocational education, the range of assessment methods, the quality and feasibility of alternative assessments, the factors influencing assessment choice and examples of the kinds of assessment decisions confronting vocational educators.

Willis, S. "On the Cutting Edge of Assesment: Testing What Students Can Do with Knowledge." *Educational Update* 38, no. 4 (June 1996): 4-7.
Challenges educators to consider student motivation to learn as the goal for schooling and to focus student assessment on practices that will provide students with information to fuel their interest in further learning.

Wolfe, E. "A Report on the Reliability of Large-Scale Portfolio Assessment for Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Council on Measurement in Education, New York, April 1996. (ED 399 285)
Presents the results of studies on inter-rater reliability with large-scale portfolio assessments. Notes that the scores for language arts, mathematics, and science classes are mixed and emphasizes that, although portfolio assessment is becoming increasingly popular, it may not survive unless portfolio scoring can meet the demands of large-scale assessment standards.

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